

# Rivals call for end to Qantas dominance

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MAJOR international airlines want the Federal Government to break Qantas's dominance of the nation's peak tourism conference.

*The Bulletin* understands that bosses at Singapore Airlines and Emirates Airlines, which are doubling their flight commitment to Australia over the next five years, want to be part of the Australian Tourism Exchange, which attracts 3000 overseas delegates.

It is understood Tourism Australia, which runs ATE, is investigating the possibility of opening the annual conference to other airlines.

Since ATE was established 25 years ago, Qantas has been the major sponsor and provides about \$1 million in airfares to overseas and domestic visitors.

In return, the national carrier swamps the conference with advertising and its all-encompassing presence, which includes 45-minute presentations from Qantas and Jetstar bosses to the world's tourism media.

In 2005 Virgin Blue was permitted to make a presentation to the media but that was quickly scuttled by TA bosses and has not since been allowed.

*The Bulletin* understands that TA is under increasing pressure from the bigger airlines to be included in ATE, despite Qantas's presence.

Emirates Airlines, Singapore Airlines, Etihad and Air New Zealand are believed to have put submissions to the Federal Government asking for ATE's policy to be relaxed to give them a presence.

Gold Coast Tourism vice-chairman Peter Doggett said yesterday the bigger airlines were 'definitely keen to be here'.

"Maybe it's time to do things differently," he said.

Former Gold Coast Tourism chief executive and head of the Raptis Group's tourism and hotel division, Pavan Bhatia, said yesterday the bigger airlines were 'in love with Australia and its potential'.

"I do believe they are keen to expand that role even further -- in some cases doubling their flights over the next five years -- and getting a part of the action at ATE is a priority," he said.

Tiger Airways spokesman Matt Hobbs said yesterday the airline had been in talks with TA about co-operative marketing strategies.

He said Qantas enjoyed a \$20 million co-operative marketing arrangement with TA.